

# Workers Struggles: Europe, Middle East & Africa

3 January 2014

## French oil refinery workers end two week pay strike

Workers employed at Total's Gonfreville refinery agreed to end their pay strike December 27. This is the last of five sites to end industrial action that began two weeks previously and affected over half of the country's refining capacity.

Jacky Pailloux, head of the Sud union at Gonfreville, said a majority of striking workers at the Normandy 247,000-barrel-per-day (bpd) refinery voted to end the work stoppage. "We took note of the end of the movement at La Mede and Feyzin and we decided to stop the strike," he told *Reuters*.

Total refused to reopen talks in the pay dispute. Despite Pailloux's comment that "Workers' demands remain. It's not an amnesty," the union has effectively conceded all demands.

*Reuters* reported, "A Total spokeswoman had said earlier in the day that workers at the 153,000 bpd La Mede refinery near Marseille had also decided to resume work. Workers at the 109,000 bpd Feyzin refinery near Lyon agree to end their strike on Thursday [December 26]."

"The strike began to crumble on Sunday when workers agreed to return to work at Total's Donges plant in western France. Total said the walkouts at the refineries, which produce mainly gasoline and diesel for motorists, had not threatened fuel shortages like those seen during a large-scale refinery strike in 2010."

Total operates five of France's eight oil refineries. The three plants not run by Total were not affected by the strike.

Oliver Jakob, analyst at Switzerland-based Petromatrix, said, "Overall we estimate that France will have lost about 5.1 million barrels of distillates and 2.5 million barrels of gasoline production during the strike."

Analysts and unions calculate that it will take a few days for refineries to bring operating levels back to normal.

## Paris airport workers in wildcat strike

Airport workers staged a wildcat strike December 26, against planned job cuts.

Lufthansa flights to and from Charles De Gaulle airport in Paris were cancelled, affecting up to 1,300 passengers

A spokesman for the Aeroports de Paris authority, which owns and manages several airports including Charles De Gaulle in the northeastern suburb of Roissy, said, "There is nobody here now, all the workers have reported sick. As a result, all flights for the day—including 11 departing from Roissy and 11 due to arrive—have been cancelled."

In a joint statement, several unions said there was a "general malaise" among Lufthansa workers at France's main airport. In competition with low-cost rivals, Lufthansa has embarked on a savings drive to boost profitability, earmarking 3,500 global job cuts,

which include around 200 in France.

Franck Bonot, an official from the Unsa union, said that since the announcement, many workers had reportedly been "tired and depressed" and several had taken medical leave, leading to understaffing levels of more than 20 percent.

## Lisbon refuse workers in week-long strike

Refuse collectors in Lisbon Portugal went on strike December 23 against the city's use of outside contractors and the privatisation of essential services, according to a statement from the CGTP union confederation.

The statement said the strike would continue until January 5, though Lisbon Mayor Antonio Costa said he thought it would take a few more days before things return to normal.

The latest strike is one of several recent actions to oppose austerity measures. The proposed 2014 budget aims to slash public sector wages and pensions as part of €3.9 billion (\$5.3 billion) of cuts.

## New Year's strike by Firefighters in England and Wales strike

Firefighters across England and Wales staged their latest strike between 18:30 (GMT) on New Year's Eve and 00:30 on New Year's Day over an assault on their pension entitlements.

The government plans to raise firefighters' retirement age from 55 to 60 years and to increase their pension contributions.

Fire crews in England and Wales last walked out a week ago. The recent work stoppage was the eighth strike in the current dispute over pensions.

The Fire Brigades' Union (FBU) has said that under the changes, at least two-thirds of firefighters would either face dismissal or a reduction in their pensions of almost half because they are unable to maintain required fitness standards beyond 55.

Further industrial action is planned for Thursday between 06:30 and 08:30.

## Civilian staff working for London's Metropolitan Police in 24-hour strike

Around 7,500 civilian staff working for the Metropolitan Police in London, including 999 (emergency) call handlers, went on a 24-hour strike December 31 in a dispute over pay.

The strike of Metropolitan Police civilian staff, which also involves community support officers and custody detention officers, was called by the Public and Commercial Services (PCS) union in protest of a below-inflation one percent pay rise.

## Lancashire postal workers in wildcat strike over dismissal

Postal workers at Royal Mail in Burnley, Lancashire staged an impromptu walk-out December 31 in support of a trade union official who they say has been unfairly dismissed.

The walkout is in support of former Burnley Council leader Stuart Caddy, who is chair of the East Lancashire branch of the

Communication Workers Union (CWU).

Royal Mail was forced to draft managers and volunteers to deliver and collect mail during the walkout.

A CWU spokesman said he could not discuss details of the case as it was pending an appeal, but said that staff had taken unofficial industrial action.

He said, "A trade union official has been dismissed and staff feel quite strongly about it and they've decided to walk out spontaneously."

The union spokesman said an official request had been put in by staff for an industrial action ballot.

#### **Southern Israeli municipal workers strike**

Municipal workers in Sderot went on strike December 27 over working conditions and the city's decision to end subsidies on cellphones. Sources in the union told *Haaretz* that the municipality had adopted a "recovery plan" that involved firing 50 workers who were forced into early retirement.

Committee chairman Mordi Aliasi sent a letter to Mayor Alon Davidi, declaring a labour dispute due to "a decline in conditions. In addition to the end on cellphone subsidies, hearings the city has scheduled prior to dismissals are reportedly another reason for the sanctions," according to *Haaretz*.

Aliasi told *Haaretz*, "Recently the new management of the municipality carried out one-sided moves, and every time we wanted to declare a slowdown the Histadrut labor federation requested that we refrain and hold negotiations,". He added, "On Thursday we sent the employees letters informing them of the detriment without due discussions with the union, despite the mayor's promise to coordinate all moves with us."

The sanctions will close some services to residents, including answering telephones at the municipality, but kindergarten and school assistants will continue working.

The last strike by Sderot municipal workers was in August, after 230 employees had not received their salaries for more than six months.

#### **24-hour strike by Egyptian doctors**

Doctors in the public health care sector staged a partial strike January 1 to demand reforms in the health care sector and vowed to stage further industrial action.

Hossam Kamal, the Rapporteur of the Media Committee of the Doctors' Syndicate, said that nationwide participation rate in the strike was around 80 percent.

Earlier on Wednesday, Health Minister Maha Al-Rabat claimed in state-run *Al-Ahram* that there are 10 governorates in which doctors did not strike at all and that strike participation rates reached only 30 percent in other governorates.

According to *Daily News Egypt*, the recent strike was dedicated by the union to the late Ahmed Abdel Latif, a doctor who contracted a fatal infection from a patient. Abdel Latif's death sparked an outcry because he was receiving hazardous pay of only EGP 19 a month as compensation for working at a place where he could contract infections.

The strike comes after negotiations between representatives of the union and the ministries of health and finance broke down last week.

Many Egyptian doctors are being forced to work outside of Egypt. Out of 250,000 Egyptian doctors, only 90,000 work inside Egypt and only 60,000 of those work in the public health sector, while the rest belong to private practices.

The union has maintained that the strike is not political. "Kamal added that anyone who raises political slogans will also be referred to

the ethics committee," reported *Daily News Egypt*.

Several doctors who participated in the 2012 strike faced victimisation in the form of threats of deductions on incentives and other difficulties such as being investigated by the administration for striking.

#### **Half-day strike of Yemeni airport workers**

Airport workers across the country staged a half-day strike December 23 over a financial dispute with the Ministry of Finance. The strike suspended all international and local flights.

The Civil Aviation Union called for the strike after the Finance Ministry froze the union's funds a month ago. The union says it is unable to continue paying workers' wages, Mohammed Al-Suraihi, the air transportation manager at Sana'a Airport, told the *Yemen Times*.

In order to pay employees salaries for the past month, the union has so borrowed about YR50 million (\$232,000) from the Yemen Post Corporation, Al-Suraihi said.

#### **Nigerian civil servants strike threat**

On Monday, Nigerian civil servants in the Association of Senior Civil Servants of Nigeria (ASCSN) threatened to strike over non-payment of their December salaries and other outstanding pay emoluments dating back to July 2013.

The union explained Nigerian civil servants are amongst the lowest paid in sub-Saharan Africa and appealed to the Trade Union Congress of Nigeria (TUC) and the Nigeria Labour Congress (NLC) to pressure the government to resolve the issue.

The union said the failure to pay public sector employees timely was a result of the government being "grossly incompetent and rabidly corrupt."

#### **Nigerian education college lecturers begin strike**

Lecturers teaching in education colleges and belonging to the Colleges of Education Academic Staff Union (COEASU) began a nationwide strike Tuesday.

The issues the union is protesting include infrastructural decay, poor funding, illegal imposition of the Integrated Personnel and Payroll Information System and the failure of the federal government to implement an agreement made between it and the union in 2010 covering terms and conditions.

Talks between the union and Ministry of Education officials between September and December failed to come to any resolution.

#### **Kenyan health workers end strike**

Medical staff and nurses who had been on strike in Kenya for 11 days returned to work just before Christmas. They had taken the action to oppose the government's plans to devolve responsibility from central to county governments.

The return to work follows an agreement signed between the unions and the government. However, none of the issues have been resolved and health employees are angry that the strike has been called off.

Seth Panyako Secretary General of the Kenya National Union of Nurses (KNUN) acknowledged that none of the grievances had been addressed and further strike action may be on the cards.



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